

TESTIMONY OF
MATTHEW CASSAVECHIA
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES
ON BEHALF OF THE WESTERN CT HEALTH NETWORK
(Danbury, Norwalk and New Milford Hospitals)
SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

HB 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue

I appreciate the opportunity to share my opposition HB 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue and ask for your support to do the same. This bill imposes new taxes and rate cuts to hospitals at a time when we are already struggling to serve the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

My role is to direct the emergency medical services for the WCHN Network in Greater Danbury. I am in the community with other dedicated first responders, literally with boots on the ground every day, and I witness the pain and suffering first-hand of the underserved we both have been tasked with caring about. Our Medicaid population has doubled in 5 years and regularly presents to our Emergency Departments with more acute and complex medical issues and less community and familial supports. The number of undocumented we serve is in the thousands and they are not eligible for the State insurance exchange nor most community programming or supports. Most recently, our Emergency Department lobby waiting area was a source of warmth, shelter and comfort for those suffering from the dangerously low temperatures and wind chills. In the most graphic of terms, we truly are the safety net for our communities and this proposed budget puts that safety net in jeopardy.

We understand the difficulty the Administration faces with the deficit budget, yet we cannot pretend to understand the rationale behind cuts that are clearly a short-term fix leading to long-term suffering and higher cost of care. The proposed budget would force us to cover millions more in new taxes and cuts to reimbursements on top of the tens of millions we are already troubled by. Further, our hospitals face a \$4 million Medicaid rate reduction for caring for those that are the most vulnerable. This will surely cripple access to primary and specialty care and drive patients to our ambulances and our emergency departments which are already over-extended.

Since this tax has been in place, we've made difficult choices and done extraordinary things to minimize the impact to our patients and our community. However, we still have many challenges to address and healthcare in CT remains a very unsettled industry-largely due to outside influences. In the last several years, we have been forced to eliminate important programs and services for our patients; reduced our workforce, staff salaries and benefits; and postponed investments in technology and infrastructure to best serve the needs of our community. If passed, this budget will once again harm our patients, our community and our employees.

In our progressive organization, we are trying to be proactive managing the needs of local seniors to ensure they thrive in their homes. We are making progress in collaboration with our community partners finding creative and cost efficient solutions to reduce unnecessary emergency department visits by our chronically homeless. Every day, clinicians and administration interact with community agencies to coordinate care for our most complex patient care needs. We are focused on the future and even ahead of the curve as a CMS-recognized ACO. This budget will seemingly impede our progress to a screeching halt.

I implore you please vote NO to new cuts to hospitals. I appreciate your service and thank you for your consideration.